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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 004299

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: EC/TURKEY: A "CLEAR RECOMMENDATION" TO START
ACCESSION TALKS

REF: A. BRUSSELS 4029

[1](#)B. PARIS 7178

Classified By: USEU poloff Harry O'Hara, reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: An upbeat Commissioner for Enlargement, Gunther Verheugen, told Ambassador Schnabel that the European Commission would make a "clear recommendation" October 6 that the EU start accession talks with Turkey. Verheugen expressed appreciation for the US's low-key support for Turkey, concern over possible French referendum plans on Turkey, and described a proposed braking mechanism on future enlargement talks as "window-dressing." The next decision point is the December 17 European Council, where EU heads of state/government will decide whether to authorize accession talks. This decision will be accompanied by a heated, emotional and highly public debate in EU capitals as well as Ankara. End Summary

A clear recommendation to start

[1](#)2. (C) Late October 5, Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen told Ambassador Schnabel that he plans to publicly recommend October 6 that Turkey has made sufficient progress on a broad range of political reforms since 1996 so that the Commission can recommend that accession negotiations begin. Verheugen said that he would offer Turkey "a clear decision" with "soft conditions." Ambassador Schnabel congratulated Verheugen on this decision, as well as his historic achievements on EU enlargement in the last five years.

US approach appreciated

[1](#)3. (C) Verheugen expressed appreciation for the US's "low-key" approach to Turkey's desire for starting accession talks with the EU. He said that this had been helpful. Other Commission officials have also expressed appreciation for the US diplomatic efforts with Turkey to keep them on track in the last few weeks as well as keeping US support for Turkey out of the bilateral US/EU political relationship. Commission officials describe the last months as a "rollercoaster" experience (ref a), particularly over recent flaps over adultery and penal code reforms. Verheugen characterized this recent period as "difficult."

Concern over France

[1](#)4. (C) Verheugen said that after October 6, Turkey goes to the member states. He said that a "comfortable majority" at the Council level favor starting accession talks with Turkey. However, Verheugen expressed particular concern with France -- particularly if the center-right seeks to amend the French constitution to require that all future EU enlargements be subject to a referendum (ref b). (Other Commission officials have voiced concerns about Austria and Slovakia.)

Good for Europe

[1](#)5. (C) Nonetheless, Verheugen was in a very positive mood. He said that Turkey has made "revolutionary changes" and the process of accession talks with the EU will only accelerate this. He stressed that not only is this positive for Turkey, but it is also good for Europe.

"Window-dressing"

[1](#)6. (C) Verheugen acknowledge concerns from other Commissioners and member-states. For that reason, the Commission has recommended that they be allowed to adopt a new "braking mechanism" for all new accession negotiations -- not just for Turkey -- but also for Croatia and any future invitees. This mechanism would allow the Commission to halt accession negotiations in the case of back-sliding on human rights or other commitments. Verheugen described this as a bit of "window-dressing," because the use of such a brake would require a majority of member-states to authorize its use. Another Commission official noted to us that the current EU Nice Treaty already contains similar mechanisms for existing EU member states, whose rights can be suspended in

the case of a serious breach of democratic standards.

Looking ahead

17. (C) The Commission will not include a proposal for the date to begin negotiations; that will be left to the December 17 European Council. Assuming a positive vote, Verheugen anticipates a ceremony sometime in January 2005 where a time for talks will be announced, and that accession talks would also start in 2005 (preferably after France sorts out its referendum concerns).

Schnabel